



THE HOLY SERVICE OF THE SLAVA



HOLY ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF BOSTON

1476 Centre Street
Roslindale, Massachusetts 02131-1417
Tel: 617.323.6379 - Fax: 617.323.3861
Web Site: <http://www.homb.org>

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Items needed for the Slava:

1. the candle (*sveca*)
2. the bread (*kolach*)
3. the boiled wheat (*koljivo*)
4. a glass of wine

These are placed on a table with the icon of the patron saint on the east side of one of the rooms in the house, together with a votive light. The candle (the *sveca*) is lit, and is never blown out, but extinguished with the wine. The wine is handed around the family circle in a wine glass, and each member takes a sip. The boiled wheat (the *koljivo*) is served in memory of the deceased (Orthodox) members of the family, who are mentioned during the service of the cutting of the bread (the *kolach*).



ture represents the Resurrection of Christ and the hope of resurrection granted to the faithful. The family gathers, the local priest* arrives, and the house becomes a “church in the house,” as in Philemon 1:2, giving glory to its protector. The candle is lit, and the priest blesses the *koljivo*, then blesses the bread and cuts it cross-wise—one cut being much deeper than the others. He then pours wine into the cuts and breaks the bread, which is kissed by the master of the house and all the family present. After the priest commemorates all family members and gives the dismissal, the lady of the house serves the *koljivo* to the family, clergy, and guests.

Customarily the hosts serve a festive meal, but they do not sit at the table themselves. But throughout the centuries, Serbs have celebrated their Slavias in poverty, in prison, in exile, in every sort of adversity. The rite requires only the *kolach*, wine, *zhito*, and a candle, and if there is no priest, the family blesses these things the best they can. A good party is hardly the purpose of the Slava, but rather the glorification of the family saint in an Orthodox manner.

In Serbian families, the Slava is transmitted to future generations through the male members of the family: from father to son, with the wife accepting her husband’s Slava. But in Orthodox Serbia, military regiments, governmental departments, and churches also celebrated a Slava. To this day Serbian churches celebrate their patron saint with *kolach*, *zhito*, and candle.

Indeed, our Orthodox diaspora offers some new conditions for the celebration of the Slava. If a Serbian woman marries a man of a different ethnic background, she may bring her Slava to her new family. Also, any Orthodox parish is free to adopt Slava customs in celebrating its patronal feast. And finally, as we have heard, some converts to Orthodoxy have chosen a patron saint for their entire families. We recommend that they affirm their unity in the faith by celebrating the ancient and pious tradition of the Serbian Slava.

*In modern practice, the man of the house may bring the *kolach* to church for the service, since the priest may have many to bless.

The Order for the Blessing and Cutting of the Kolach (The Serbian “Slava”)

The Priest, having vested himself with the epitrachilion, beginneth as usual: Blessed is our God, always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.

Reader: Amen.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us (*thrice*). Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, both now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

All-Holy Trinity have mercy on us; Lord, be gracious unto our sins; Master, pardon our iniquities; Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities for Thy Name’s sake.

Lord have mercy (*thrice*).

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, both now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father, Which art in the heavens, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.

Priest: For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.

Reader: Amen.

Then the Dismissal Hymn of the Saint being celebrated; Glory; both now, *then the Kontakion of the Saint being commemorated.*

The Priest, having censed the bread and koljivo that hath been offered and those present, if this be the custom of the house, he readeth the prayer of the koljivo:

Priest: Let us pray to the Lord.

Reader: Lord have mercy.

Priest: O Thou that hast brought all things unto perfection by Thy word, O Lord, and hast commanded the earth to produce fruits of every kind for our enjoyment and sustenance; Who with grains didst show the Three Children and Daniel to be fairer than them that in Babylon lived sumptuously: Do Thou, O supremely good King, bless these grains also together with these divers fruits, and sanctify them that partake thereof; for it is unto Thy glory, O Lord, that they have been presented by Thy servants, and in honour and memory of *(names)*, and also in memory of them that have finished their life in godly faith. And do Thou only Good, grant unto them that have prepared these things and maintain this custom their every salutary request, and the enjoyment of Thine everlasting good things. By the intercessions of our All-immaculate Lady Theotokos and Ever-virgin Mary, of *(names)*, whose memory we also keep, and of all Thy Saints. For Thou art He that blesseth and sanctifieth all things, O Christ our God, and to Thee do we send up glory, with Thy Father Which is without beginning, and Thine All-holy and good and life-creating Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.

Reader: Amen.

Then taking the kolach, the priest blesseth it and the vessel containing wine three times, saying:

Priest: O Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, bless this bread and this wine by Thy Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. *(thrice)*

Reader: Amen. *(each time)*

The priest lifting up the bread, prayeth:

Priest: O Lord God, unto Thee do we offer these things for the glory and honour of Thy Saint *(the Saint being commemorated)*, by whose supplication do Thou accept this offering, O All-Merciful, unto Thine Altar above the Heavens.

Grand Zhupan Stefan Nemanja, was first baptized in the Latin church and then re-baptized in the Orthodox. And though the royal house was then Orthodox, it fell to the new Archbishop and his clergy to preach the Orthodox Faith and then baptize the many Serbian families who now abjured their paganism and heresies and embraced Orthodoxy.

So the people prepared themselves and their homes, and whole extended families received the enlightenment of Baptism on a certain saint's day. Thus once and for all, until the present time at least, St. Sava brought the Serbian people into the Orthodox fold. And the means by which succeeding generations call to mind their baptismal vows and reaffirm their devotion to Orthodoxy is their celebration of the Krsna Slava, the family Patron Saint. In this ritual, the bond of unity, love, and faith remains unbroken between the ancient clans and their distant descendants throughout the world.

To celebrate the Slava, one needs only a few essential items, items already familiar to the Orthodox Christian: bread, wine, boiled wheat—called *zhito* or *koljivo*—and a candle. The bread, which must be round, can be a simple one of white flour, yeast, water, a pinch of salt, a little oil, a little holy water. The most important decorations, made from a dough of flour and water, are four stamps made with a prosphora seal: IC XC NIKA. These are arranged around a Cross placed in the center. Other embellishments include two birds, representing doves of peace, and two bunches of grapes, representing the first-fruits of the harvest—presumably in both a literal and spiritual sense. Often a braid surrounds the whole bread, representing the Holy Trinity, and it is often clipped on top, commemorating the Crown of Thorns and Christ's Life-giving Passion.

On the day of the Slava, the hosts, traditionally the oldest living members of an extended family, place this bread or *kolach* on a table in front of the Slava icon, along with a candle, a pitcher of red wine, and a dish of *koljivo*. Unlike funeral wheat, this is usually ground, though sugar or honey, spices, and ground nuts are added. This mix-

THE SERBIAN SLAVA: HISTORY, RITUAL, AND CUSTOM

By Margaret Jerinic

Among all the Orthodox, the Serbs have the unique tradition of celebrating a family patron saint—a “name day” of the entire family which far exceeds in importance the name day of individual family members. This feast day is called the Slava—more completely Krsna Slava. In both ancient and modern Slavonic tongues, Slava means “Glory”, so that the Serbian Slava is the “glorification” or worship of the family saint. Furthermore, in Serbian, the adjective *Krsna* means “Baptismal”—hence, the Baptismal Slava. Herein we perceive the great beauty and holiness of this tradition. Even today, the Serbian family celebrates the feast day of the same saint that its ancestors celebrated, the same saint that its tribal forefathers adopted as their own on the day of their baptism.

However, it is uncertain exactly when this custom originated. No precise records exist, as for the Baptism of Rus, detailing exactly when the Serbs became Orthodox. There is evidence that in the later ninth century, during the reign of Emperor Basil I in Constantinople, the Serbs asked for clergy to instruct and to baptize them. And at this time, the disciples of Sts. Cyril and Methodius were active in the Balkans. But it appears that for several centuries, Orthodoxy was not firmly established in the Serbian principalities. Some people may have remained pagans; certainly many pagan customs survived. And despite the faith and holiness of many, the Serbs, who occupy the very borderland between Orthodox East and Latin West, suffered from the inroads of the Latins or Roman Catholics. Also, another menace had spread abroad in the land: the Bogomil heresy, a “home-grown” Balkan version of Manichean dualism.

In fact, some believe that the celebration of the Slava as a baptismal feast began much later than the ninth century: indeed that St. Sava, the first Archbishop of Serbia, initiated the practice in the thirteenth century. Certainly, as we have seen, Orthodoxy was long under siege in Serbia. St. Sava’s own father, the Grand Prince or

The priest inverteth the kolach, cutteth it crosswise, one cut being deep and one being shallow, crosswise, and poureth wine into the cuts, saying: In the Name of the Father (Amen), and of the Son (Amen), and of the Holy Spirit (Amen), now and ever, and unto the ages of ages (Amen). Then the priest turneth the kolach face up, and he and the family holdeth the bread and rotate it while the following hymns are chanted:

Grave (7th) Tone

O holy martyrs, who have contested well and have been crowned: Intercede ye with the Lord that He have mercy on our souls.

Glory to Thee, O Christ God, the boast of the Apostles, the joy of the Martyrs, who proclaimed the consubstantial Trinity.

Plagal of First (5th) Tone

Dance, O Esaias, the Virgin hath conceived and hath given birth to a Son, Emmanuel, Who is both God and Man; Orient is His Name. In magnifying Him, we call the Virgin blessed.

After that, the priest and the host pick up the kolach and break it in half. Holding the two halves together, the cut sides facing out, the priest and the host kiss the kolach three times, alternating the two halves, and each time the priest saith:

Priest: Christ is in our midst !

And the host and his household respond:

Host: He is and shall be! (*each time*)

Second Tone

Reader or Priest: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

By the intercessions of the holy (*the Saint being commemorated*), O Merciful One, blot out the multitude of mine offences.

Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

By the intercession of the Theotokos, O Merciful One, blot out the multitude of mine offences

Verse: Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy, and according to the multitude of Thy compassions, blot out my transgression.

Either the sticheron from Matins of the Saint celebrated is chanted (the one chanted after the Gospel Reading), or else the following:

Plagal of Second (6th) Tone

Today the grace of God brought us together and, taking up Thy Cross let us say: Blessed is the He that cometh in the Name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!

Priest: Have mercy upon us according Thy great mercy, we pray Thee, hearken and have mercy.

Reader: Lord have mercy. (*thrice*)

Optional:

Priest: Again we pray for our pious Sovereign and King (*name*).

Reader: Lord have mercy. (*thrice*)

Priest: Again we pray for our Most Reverend Bishop (*name*) and for our brethren in Christ.

Reader: Lord have mercy. (*thrice*)

Priest: Again we pray for this home and those who dwell herein (*names*) who keep this custom for the glory and honour of Thy Saint (*the name of the Saint*).

Reader: Lord have mercy. (*thrice*)

Priest: For Thou art a merciful and man-befriending God, and unto Thee we send up glory, to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.

Reader: Amen.

Priest: Wisdom! Most Holy Theotokos, save us.

Reader: More honorable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim, thee who without corruption gavest birth to God the Word, the very Theotokos, thee do we magnify.

Priest: Glory to Thee, O Christ God, our Hope, glory to Thee.

Reader: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Lord have mercy. (*thrice*) Father, bless!

The priest says the Dismissal, then he intones Many years for the members of the household.

Note: It should be noted that Slavos of the Archangels and of the various feasts of the Master and the Theotokos do not have *koljivo*. This is the usual custom; but others say that one can prepare *koljivo* for these feasts: it is offered for the departed in the family.

